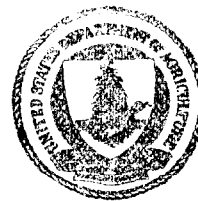


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CROWS NOT SO BLACK
AS THEY ARE PAINTED

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Crows have recently been roundly condemned in numerous sportsmen's periodicals and newspapers because of their destructiveness to other bird life, especially game birds. The articles, which were based on information gathered on the coastal islands of Virginia by an expedition financed by a well-known ammunition company, have made a profound impression in many quarters. Under emphasis on peculiar local conditions, however, together with lack of distinction between the common crow and the fish crow and a faulty interpretation of the evidence at hand, has conveyed a grossly exaggerated and wholly erroneous idea of the predatory habits of the crow, according to specialists of the Biological Survey, United States Department of Agriculture.

That the situation is by no means so serious as pictured is apparent from statements in the articles that the Virginia islands mentioned abound in game and are the favorite nesting places of large numbers of marsh birds. The whole district also is, and has been for many generations, one of the favorite hunting places of the East.

There is no question that on these Virginia islands the fish crow and the smaller numbers of the common crow present are to be seen at their worst, as regards their relation to other birds. These objectionable traits have been given due consideration in the efforts of the Biological Survey to appraise correctly the economic worth of the crow. Such activities, however, must be placed in their true perspective, and evidence secured under peculiar local conditions can not serve as a basis for a universal estimation of the species.

Government experts state that the bird to blame for most of the vandalism on the Virginia islands is the fish crow, a species quite different in habits from the common crow. While mention has been made of this fact in the articles referred to, the difference is frequently lost sight of and the whole race of crows is condemned by the evidence obtained largely against the maritime species.

The number of eggs of other birds reported to have been found under crow nests also has been emphasized. Under a right interpretation, this evidence will have a less serious meaning, so far as other bird life is concerned. Scientists state that breeding birds readily replenish losses due to egg destruction, and under the conditions described the production of two or more sets of eggs before a brood is brought forth is doubtless the regular occurrence.

The Biological Survey takes the attitude that on game farms and on reservations where both time and money are spent to maintain bird life in more than normal numbers, control of certain injurious species, including the crow, is warranted and even necessary. Government experts have done considerable experimental work and advise control measures in localities where the birds are injurious to crops. On the other hand, a careful study of the economic status of the crow demonstrates that over much of its range the bird probably does as much good as harm, and under some conditions its usefulness is pronounced. A full discussion of the crow's worth is given in Farmers' Bulletin 1102, The Crow in its Relation to Agriculture, obtainable on application to the United States Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C.